



# NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES

## History of the Games

Now in its 24<sup>th</sup> year, the National Veterans Golden Age Games offer sports and recreational competitive events for Veterans 55 years of age and older. It is the largest sports and recreation competition for this age group of military Veterans in the world! The Games continue to serve as a showcase for the rehabilitation value that wellness and fitness provide in the lives of older Americans.

The National Veterans Golden Age Games are an outgrowth of the historic involvement in geriatric programs by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). For many years, VA has put major emphasis on health and fitness with the goal of Veterans living healthier, longer lives. Many of the events began as recreational activities at VA hospitals and nursing homes across the country. Inspired by the health and fitness movement for America's senior citizens, the Games extend that concept to our nation's aging Veterans. In 1985, the first National Veterans Golden Age Games took place in Albany, Georgia, with 115 competitors representing VA medical facilities across the United States.

A "fountain of youth" for the rapidly aging Veteran population, the Games provide a multi-event sports and therapeutic recreation program for eligible Veterans receiving care at any VA medical facility. It is the premier senior adaptive rehabilitation program in the United States, and the only national seniors' program designed to improve the quality of life for all older Veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. This event truly reflects VA's mission – to provide quality programs and health care for America's aging Veteran population. It has become one of the most progressive and adaptive rehabilitative senior sports programs in the United States and the world.

Over the years, competitive events at the National Veterans Golden Age Games have been adapted to meet specific needs of the participants. The Games have separate age groups and gender divisions. Additionally, because many Veterans also face medical challenges, events were added for those who use wheelchairs and those who have visual impairments. To accommodate the varying degrees of physical conditioning, motor and cognitive skills of the participants, basic competition rules were adapted. The modification of rules and use of adaptive equipment in many events allow non-ambulatory and visually impaired Veterans to participate, in separate divisions where needed and with ambulatory and sighted Veterans when possible. This has made the National Veterans Golden Age Games a truly adaptive therapeutic sports competition that has become a model for other local, state and national senior sports events.

Since 2004, the National Veterans Golden Age Games have been a qualifier for the National Senior Games, a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee. Through this partnership, gold, silver and bronze medalists in certain events have the opportunity to compete further, among America's elite senior athletes. In 2008, 375 competitors qualified for the 2009 National Senior Games in San Francisco, California.

## Page 2 National Veterans Golden Age Games History

This outstanding program has grown from 115 participants its first year to 683 in 2009, making it the largest of VA's six rehabilitation special events. For the past several years, the aging Vietnam Veteran population has entered the Games in greater numbers, making up the largest group of competitors by period of service. By age group, the over-70 age categories are now the largest.

Since the Games began, Veterans have competed in cities across the United States. A listing of event locations and hosting VA medical facilities follows.

### National Veterans Golden Age Games: 1985-2010

Year:	Location:	Host VA Medical Facilities:
1985	Albany, Georgia	Atlanta and Dublin VA Medical Centers
1987	Ft. Lyon, Colorado	Ft. Lyon VA Medical Center
1988	Marion, Indiana	Marion VA Medical Center
1990	Sherman, Texas	Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center, Bonham
1991	St. Petersburg, Florida	Bay Pines VA Medical Center
1992	Ypsilanti, Michigan	Ann Arbor VA Medical Center
1993	Johnson City, Tennessee	Mountain Home VA Medical Center
1994	Lisle, Illinois	Edward Hines, Jr. Veterans Hospital
1995	Dallas, Texas	Dallas VA Medical Center
1996	Riverside, California	Jerry L. Pettis VA Medical Center
1997	Leavenworth, Kansas	Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Medical Center
1998	Leesburg, Virginia	VA Capitol Network
1999	Geneva, New York	Canandaigua VA Medical Center
2000	Topeka, Kansas	VA Heartland Network
2001	Duncanville, Texas	VA North Texas Health Care System
2002	Los Angeles, California	VA Grater Los Angeles Healthcare System
2003	Orono, Maine	Togus VA Medical Center and Regional Office
2004	Fresno, California	VA Central California Health Care System
2005	Norman, Oklahoma	Oklahoma City VA Medical Center
2006	Hampton, Virginia	Hampton VA Medical Center
2007	Houston, Texas	Michael E. Debakey VA Medical Center
2008	Indianapolis, Indiana	Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center
2009	Birmingham, Alabama	Birmingham VA Medical Center
2010	Des Moines, Iowa	VA Central Iowa Health Care System

*"Life begins at 55"* — at least it does for the Veterans competing in the National Veterans Golden Age Games. This event clearly demonstrates that sports and fitness are important for *all* Americans, at any age. It is a national showcase for the preventive and therapeutic value of sports, fitness, and recreation — all vital ingredients in VA's extensive rehabilitation programs. Since the beginning, the event has encouraged older Veterans to remain active, both physically and mentally. Each year, those who participate return home to encourage others to do the same.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Help Hospitalized Veterans (HHV) and the Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) co-sponsor the National Veterans Golden Age Games each year. This partnership fosters an exceptional, quality event that promises serious competition and lasting memories for our nation's older Veterans.

